Pistol Pete Maravich: A tortured genius, perhaps the most remarkable superstar the NBA has ever seen

Fair warning, yes this is 6,000 words on a reddit page. I do post this every couple of years. I wrote this for the first time at the start of Covid without much else to do, and ended up completely locking in and putting the whole thing together in about five days. It was the first time if my life that I really got invested in telling a story, and a story about a 1970s basketball player who never won a playoff series as a starter ended up being the reason that I first thought about pursuing a career in journalism. There are parts of it that could be edited or improved for format, but I honestly haven't touched it since. Hope you enjoy.

Pistol Pete Maravich: A tortured genius, perhaps the most remarkable superstar the NBA has ever seen

In his prime, Pete Maravich was a depressed, alcoholic insomniac who many considered to be completely insane. Born without a left coronary artery, he was suffering from a heart condition that took most of its victims by twenty, and was meant to make being an athlete completely impossible.

He was also one of the most innovative players in basketball history, the precursor to the passing of Bird and Magic and the dribbling moves of Isiah Thomas, and nobody matched his tendency for taking 30 foot shots in transition for many years to come. The feats that he accomplished on the court have been matched by few in history, but whatever he did was never enough. On the road to reaching the NBA's mountain top, he brought the basketball world joy and himself misery.

Upbringing:

Pete had what many people would consider to be an abusive childhood, as his father Press geared him to become what he would later describe as "a basketball android". He was forced to play basketball 8–10 hours per day, and Press intentionally hit him in the face with a baseball when he wanted to play that sport instead. In another instance, Press told Pete's football coach to tell the team's O-Line not to block for Pete when he wanted to play QB (Press had some sway locally as he was the head coach for Clemson basketball at the time). Reportedly, Press threatened to shoot Pete with a 45 caliber pistol if he ever drank or got into trouble in his youth; nothing could derail his future as an NBA great.

Press Maravich originally got his son hooked on basketball by playing outside with a smile on his face, making it seem like the most fun thing in the world. When a very young Pete asked to play with him, Press said he was too small and weak, causing Pete to adopt the game out of jealousy.

From there, Press relentlessly trained his son and prioritized basketball over everything else. Press told his young son that if he listened to what his father said, he would become a million dollar player who could win an NBA championship, and that these accomplishments would make Pete the happiest man in the world. The thoughts of achieving these dreams would come to consume Pete.

Pete was playing for his high school's varsity team by the seventh grade. It was around this time that he earned the nickname "Pistol", as he was very skinny even for his age and looked as if he was hoisting jump shots from his hip.

It was also around this time that Maravich began to develop his innovative and revolutionary basketball skills, especially for the time. He has described throwing a behind the back pass that went through the defender's legs on a fast break, leading to a score. The small high school crowd erupted, unable to comprehend what they had just seen. In this moment, showtime was born, as doing the seemingly impossible on the court gave Pete a reason to play for himself.

College Career:

While Pete had originally wanted to play for West Virginia University (which had a very good team) and become their next Jerry West, he joined LSU's team to be coached by his father.

The season before Pete arrived, LSU finished 3–23 and just 1–17 in the SEC. After a decade of terrible basketball, the program was at an all-time low.

At LSU, Maravich averaged 44.2 points per game in total, obliterating the NCAA's total D-1 scoring record in just three seasons. In his senior year, he accounted for 57 points per game between points and assists despite there being no three point line, and won the Naismith Men's College Player of the Year Award.

For three years, Pistol Pete turned a football school into a basketball one, and despite being a collegiate player, he was as big a star as any player in the world.

Some of the stories are incredible. On the last game of his junior year, LSU was playing AT Georgia. Pete led an insane comeback, hitting the shot at the horn to take it into OT. Behind a ridiculous run from Pete, LSU began to pull away in overtime. Pete then froze the ball for the final minute or two to preserve LSU's eight-point lead. By this point, the UGA fans were chanting "PISTOL", as they were witnessing a show they would likely never see again.

With time winding down, UGA called off their defense and admitted defeat. Pete dribbled to mid court, and as time expired, shot a hook shot, turned, began to trot to his locker, and sunk it. As he was jogging to the locker, the UGA fans and cheerleaders stormed the court and carried HIM off on their shoulders.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8qUZILi8IM (highlights of a young Pete putting on a show from the limited footage available)

He transformed LSU into the second best team in the SEC by his final season, and they earned a final four berth in the NIT (meant to be consisting of the 26th-41st best teams in college basketball).

In the tournament, LSU defeated Georgetown and Oklahoma in the first two rounds. However, they lost in the semis to a Marquette team that was ranked eighth in all of college basketball and declined to play in the NCAA tournament in favor of the NIT due to travel demands. Marquette easily won the tournament.

Pete was hacked throughout the tournament to get him off of his rhythm; by the end of the tournament he was said to have had swelling on his head, a bruised hip, a strained ligament, and a sprained ankle in addition to a stomach bug that caused him to lose ten pounds.

Reflecting on his fame and speculating about his future after the tournament, Pete said "I tell you, everybody thinks I've got it made but, you know, it's not worth it. There is so much pressure, and people — every day, every day. You know when I've had the most fun? When I went to Daytona all

by myself last year and just took it easy. Nobody knew me. Sometimes I wish I could be an accountant or something, man, so I could live right for a change".

Speaking on how he handled the negative attention that came with losing in the tournament, Pete said "When I play that bad, I try to forget it. I'll just go hide in my little corner." By his corner, he was referring to an East Side bar where he went to drink away the disappointment that came from whatever he did and whatever he accomplished never being enough. In the years prior, Pete's mother, Helen, had become increasingly addicted to liquor corresponding with her unhappiness. It seemed as if Pete, who to the outside world had everything going for him, had begun to go down the same path.

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After a famed collegiate career, Maravich was given lucrative offers to become the first white Harlem Globetrotter in 30 years, or to play for the Carolina Cougars in the ABA, who took him with the first overall pick. Both would have fit his style brilliantly; the Globetrotters would have given Pete a chance to entertain and enjoy the game without any of the pressure that came from a life geared towards winning in basketball, and the Cougars were badly in need of a prolific scorer.

The ABA also had a three point line, and guys like Louie Dampier were taking seven per game; it's hard to imagine the kind of freedom that the Pistol would have been given to try to break scoring records. Alas, Pete's dream from the time he could lift up a basketball had been to become an NBA superstar and champion, so he was going to Atlanta.

Atlanta Hawks:

"This man has been quicker and faster than Jerry West or Oscar Robertson. He gets the ball up the floor better. He shoots as well. Raw-talentwise, he's the greatest who ever played. The difference comes down to style. He will be a loser, always, no matter what he does. That's his legacy. It never looked easy being Pete Maravich."- Atlanta Hawks co-star, Lou Hudson

It cannot be stressed enough just how foreign Pistol Pete's game was to the NBA. When he arrived, the game was dominated by physically imposing centers and supplemented by conservative and methodical guards. Even the best guards, Jerry West and Oscar Robertson, switched hands sparingly as they made their way up and down the court; Pete doing just that was considered unusual. However, Pete also threw no-look, behind the back, around the back with the wrong hand, underhand full court, and between the legs passes. He dribbled between the legs and behind the back, throwing in his patented stutter dribble. He shot from 25 feet despite there being no three point incentive.

Here are some Maravich highlights from parts of three games (very few games are currently publicly available) from his Hawks tenure: even without context from his era its easy to see he was special: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cL74uXq5l2o

While Pete's detractors painted him as an entertainer (which he was) who cared less about results than his individual highlights, really and truly, Maravich believed there was a method to his madness. Maravich addressed the criticism after his third season in the league: "They kept harping, 'Why do you dribble into traffic?' I enjoy going into traffic; that's my game. I can create that way. That's what me and a lot of young guys are into — revolutionizing basketball. The two-handed set shot used to be a big thing, but nobody's seen anyone take one in five years. We're working on things like passing and dribbling now. Take the chest pass. Five years from now you may never see another one of them."

Among Maravich's biggest detractors were his new Hawks teammates. From the moment that Maravich signed a record-breaking 5 year, $1,900,000 contract as an unproven rookie, he was going to be unpopular. This giant contract (for the time) also caused Hawks management to cheap out on paying Joe Caldwell, a top fifteen player in the league who had just led the Hawks to a playoff series win by averaging 29 points. Perhaps more importantly, they had never seen anything like the Pistol on the court, and they hated playing with him. Players didn't know when to expect passes that weren't telegraphed beforehand, and initially they were often nailed in the body, or if they were less lucky, the face by Pete's no-look passes.

In response to this, as well as the management's decision to promote Pete and Pete only, many players on the team made it their mission to make Pete's life hell via taunting him and refusing to associate with him, trying to drive him off the team. Lenny Wilkens, a Supersonic who had starred for the Hawks two years earlier said regarding the situation, "A lot of guys who might have been good cracked under such circumstances. Pete kept his wits. He hung in there. He survived." It wasn't until later that it would be widely known how much that treatment impacted him; it had begun a certain paranoia of Pete's that the world was out to get him.

While these circumstances certainly didn't help, through 54 games it looked like the Hawks' players were right about Pete. The Hawks were stunningly bad at 17–37, and Maravich was struggling. He was a defensive turnstile, a turnover machine, and he was struggling with his shot. Given that the season was already over for the Hawks, the Pistol would be given the chance to run the offense, and suddenly a switch flipped. Not only did the Hawks win 19 of their final 27 games, Pete averaged 30.6 points over his final 17 appearances and the Hawks snuck into the playoffs to face the defending champion New York Knicks, featuring Willis Reed and Walt Frazier. The Hawks would lose in five, but Pistol had his moments, averaging 22–5–5 while being hounded by Frazier, who was considered the best defensive guard in the game.

Pete's next three years with the Hawks were filled with ups and downs. At the beginning of his second season, he had a bad case of mononucleosis, reportedly falling from 205 to 170 pounds. It took him the entire year to regain his form from the end of his rookie year. In the first round of the playoffs, he averaged 28–5 against a very good Celtics team, but still fell in six games.

The next year, he and Lou Hudson became the second pair of teammates to both score 2,000 points in a season after Elgin Baylor and Jerry West, and the team won 46 games. However, they lost to the (68 win) Celtics again in six with Pete averaging 27–6. At this point, the team around Pistol and Hudson had begun to seriously decline, and they were carrying the squad. Although Maravich was second in the league in points per game in 1974, the Hawks fell to 35 wins.

At this time, Pete began to be widely labeled as a loser. His individual exploits turned heads but they did not win games; it didn't matter that his partner, Lou Hudson, had his best four scoring years alongside Pete, or that Walt Bellamy had resurrected a declining career. It didn't matter that despite receiving a load of assets in trading Pete to an expansion franchise (received two first round picks, two second round picks and Dean Meminger), the Hawks won no more than 31 games in their next three seasons, and Hudson never made another all-star team. As Lou had said, Pete had been painted as a loser due to the absurdity of his game, and perhaps a championship was the only thing that could change that.

None of this unwanted negative attention, however, is what finally broke Pete. Somewhere along the way, Pete's mother, Helen, had lost her will. Alcohol had become her escape from a painful life, but it hadn't done anything to make her happy. Just eight days before the beginning of the 1974 NBA season, she took her own life with a bullet to the head. Pete, who had been vulnerable from the start, began to fall into a pit of insanity.

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While it was the death of Pete's mother that likely brought on what was to come, there were signs that things weren't going well for Pete off the court beforehand. Although it would not be disclosed until years later, the reasons for Maravich's trade from the Atlanta Hawks had nothing to do with basketball. Pete, similarly to his mother, had gradually grown to abuse alcohol more and more.

On February third, 1974, he took this habit and applied it to the game. At halftime in a close game against the Houston Rockets, Pete downed several bottles, claimed he was alright, and stumbled onto the court to start the second half. He was completely ineffective. Following the game, Pete was suspended indefinitely by Cotton Fitzsimmons, the coach of the Hawks at the time.

Pete did not react well to the suspension, and it created a situation where either he or Fitzsimmons had to go. The Hawks made their decision, and the Pistol's next stop would be for an expansion team in New Orleans.

New Orleans Jazz:

1974–1975:

Going to the Jazz gave Pete the opportunity to return to Louisiana, the site of his legendary college career. Given that the rest of the roster was made up of players that were considered expendable from other squads, Pete was going to be given the chance to be their entire offense like he had at LSU. The Jazz wouldn't be good initially, but Pete was a good bet to win the scoring title after coming in second the year before.

Following his mother Helen's suicide just a week before the season, all of that came crashing down. Not only was Pete devastated, he had internalized his sorrow. His drinking problem became worse, and he became a recluse from society. Those who were around him worried that his misery had brought on insanity.

Pete's transformation from unhappy but functional NBA superstar to perceived nutjob happened quickly. Along with his alcoholism, Pete had developed an obsession with extraterrestrials and UFOs; he reportedly painted the words "TAKE ME" on the roof of his house so that aliens would capture him and carry him away from the world. He went days without sleeping, and he began to devour survivalist magazines. Pete's behaviorally engineered childhood had made him always liable to lose it, but it was personal tragedy that pushed him over the edge.

While Pete was in no state to be playing for the Jazz, he took to the court for their season opener. Predictably, he couldn't perform. In Utah's first nine games, Maravich surpassed 15 points just twice. Things didn't get better quickly; the Jazz lost 31 of their first 33 games with Pete playing some of the worst basketball of his career. While Maravich eventually turned it around to a degree, his team ultimately still finished as the worst team in basketball by a wide margin. The Jazz were mocked for trading away so many assets, which included the first overall pick in the upcoming draft in exchange for Pete. As for Pete, he had become more ridiculed than revered.

Luckily for the basketball world, this isn't how Pete's story would end. While he had lost all of his joy from basketball, he was as driven as ever by the same compulsive urge that had been built into him as a child. In his prime, Pistol Pete Maravich was a depressed, alcoholic insomniac who many considered to be completely insane. He was suffering from a heart condition that took most of its victims by twenty and was meant to make being an athlete completely impossible. He was also arguably the best player in the NBA.

Pistol Pete in his prime:

Pete was never given a fair shot at winning with the Jazz; the team never provided Pete with much talent around him, and were underfunded and at times undercut. Here is some evidence:

1. **Over the next three seasons, the Jazz would win just 19 of 61 games with Pete off of the floor**
2. **In 1975, the Jazz got the rights to a young ABA big man by the name of Moses Malone. You might have heard of him; only Kareem, Jordan, Russell, Chamberlain, and LeBron have won more MVPs. While the Jazz and everyone else were well aware of Malone's talent, they decided they couldn't afford his salary, which was only about half of what Kareem was getting from the Lakers. This led Malone to eventually end up in Houston.**
3. **In 1976, the Jazz picked up guard Gail Goodrich in free agency. While Goodrich had been a perennial All-Star, he was among the oldest players in the league, was defensively challenged, and was no longer the same player that he had been offensively. While the Jazz did not expect to give up meaningful assets in exchange for signing him, they ended up parting with three top ten picks, one of which was used to select Magic Johnson. Goodrich later alleged that the NBA stepped in at the last minute and demanded very significant compensation to the Lakers in exchange for his signing (https://www.deseret.com/1992/7/16/18994586/goodrich-tells-his-side-in-jazz-magic-deal)**

With that being said, Pete was sure as hell going to try.

In 1975–1976, the Jazz had an almost identical roster to the previous year, but things were far different. Throughout the year, Pete carried the previously bottom feeding Jazz, and they managed a very surprising 32–30 record while he was on the court. While statistically Pete did not separate himself from his years in Atlanta; he averaged 26 points and 5 assists, he had become a much more well-rounded player, and the game had begun to catch up to him.

His defense, which had forever been his greatest weakness, had become downright passable. He had become stronger, an even better shooter, and his handles were perhaps even more otherworldly. Maybe most importantly, his teammates had learned when to expect his passes; he was no longer playing a more complicated game that nobody else knew the rules of. Unfortunately, the Jazz only managed a 6–14 record with Pete off the court, preventing the team from being able to make a playoff push. Despite this failure, Pete was still recognized for his efforts in turning the team around, earning his first All-NBA First Team nod.

1976–1977:

The next year was likely Pete's most famous as a pro.

43 points vs the defending champion Celtics, 50 against a great Washington Bullets team, 51 against the Suns, who had just been in the finals, another 51 against the Kansas City Kings. 68 against the New York Knicks. Those 68 were the most by any guard in the league's history at that point, surpassing Jerry West's career high of 63 fifteen years earlier. Thankfully, footage from the game is still available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zfHRk2rKHc

68 is a big number, but there are a couple of factors that make the game even more incredible than it would at first seem. Firstly, a good deal of his points were against reigning 7x All-Defensive First Team member Walt Frazier. Secondly, he inadvertently hit about five shots from current three-point range, and made another seven or eight shots from close to twenty feet.

Knicks players had no idea how to guard him; at 8:30 in the video one resorts to the "double butt pat", but it doesn't work. Finally, Pete's fifth foul was completely indefensible, and his sixth that quickly followed was a block called a charge. Pete fouled out with 1:30 left in the game. If the right calls had been made, he would have had a great shot at 74+ points, making it the most that anyone not named Wilt or Kobe has ever scored in a game to this day.

For the season, Pete averaged 31.1 points, winning the scoring title by a 4.5 point margin. He became only the third guard in the league's 30 year history to win a scoring title after Oscar Robertson and Jerry West (1968 and 1970 respectively). While the Jazz finished only 35–47 (1–8 without Pete) his peers voted him in third place for MVP behind only Kareem and Bill Walton, a tremendous sign that after a life devoted to achieving greatness, he had finally arrived. While Pete's life in truth was still in a state of disarray, basketball had given him peace and a sense of validation for the first time in forever.

1977–1978:

Going into the 1977 free agency, Pete was coming off of the best season that a guard had managed since Tiny Archibald in 1973. All that was left from his childhood dream was to win a championship, which he cultivated obsessively. With the current state of New Orleans' roster, Pete wasn't going to be able to do that. In exchange for his re-signing, he demanded front-line help. The Jazz's front office granted his wish, signing promising fourth year power forward Leonard "Truck" Robinson, who was coming off of a breakout season averaging 19–11 for the Hawks.

Unfortunately, new Jazz GM Lewis Schaffel had no plans of allowing the pairing to gel. Early in the season, Schaffel let it slip to the media that he believed Maravich to be a player that no team could win with, and actively began trying to trade him. In a press conference, Pete had some choice words to say about his new GM,

"He's a lying, backstabbing son of a bitch who's been out to get me from the start." Then he said, "Schaffel doesn't know a basketball from a turkey bladder. We could make the playoffs if he'd take a vacation. Like, to Iraq."

While Maravich and Robinson were getting their numbers, the Jazz experienced the same old struggles to start the season, sitting at 17–21 through 38 games. This, of course, preceded the Pistol Pete fuck you tour of 1978.

Over the next nine games (all victories), Pete averaged 30 points and nine assists, for the first time looking truly in sync with his teammates. He connected on more of his passes than ever before, and played the best defense of his career. Pete was on another level, and he started to look like the best player in the world.

In 1978, injuries to Bill Walton and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar would burst the 1978 NBA MVP race wide open. Maravich was best positioned to take their place at the top. His averages on the surging Jazz (28.2–6.9) would have given him his second straight scoring title and put him fourth in assists per game behind players with half the scoring rate.

While a deep playoff run was unlikely, injuries ensured that there were no great teams in the league by the time the playoffs rolled around, and it was far from impossible; in the end, a 44 win team would be crowned champions. On January 31st, in the fourth quarter of a blowout win against the Buffalo Braves, all of this would change. As Pete completed his 15th assist of the night on a half-court, between-the-legs pass, the crowd got to their feet, and Pete fell to the ground, crying in agony.

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Pete's torn meniscus was originally misdiagnosed as a knee strain, and six weeks later he was back on the court. After three games hobbling around and averaging nine points, his season was over, and he would eventually have surgery. The Jazz finished their season 12–20 without Maravich on the court, increasing their total to 19 wins in 61 games without Pete during his three prime years.

While Pete would return to the court to start the next season, the magic, revolutionary player was gone. He wore a giant knee brace and struggled to change directions like he once had or jump and contort his body to finish or set up opportunities for teammates. Maravich said regarding his situation at the time,

"Sometimes I do the things on the court I want to do and I think I'll be O.K. Then I can't do them. I stop. It is very frustrating. It's a bad, bad feeling."

In one year, the Jazz had gone from a dark horse contender to the worst team in the league. Maravich had gone from on the cusp of being the best player in the world to a small net positive on a terrible team. They went as far as the Pistol did, and after a brilliant but too-short prime, he was done.

With Pete and the Jazz struggling, ticket sales in New Orleans fell dramatically from what had been third in the league the year before. This, combined with their owner being a devout Mormon, resulted in the Jazz being moved to Utah. Pete no longer could dream of being the savior of professional basketball in New Orleans as he had been at LSU. While Pete had managed a winning record with the Jazz from the 1975–1976 season to his injury in 1978 (92–90), his injuries and team's struggles without him on the court ensured that he had never even brought them to the playoffs. For many fans, that's the main thing that would be remembered from his legacy.

The next year, Pete was even more damaged, and Utah was ready to let him go. During a ten game losing streak, the Jazz began to dwindle Pete's minutes before deciding to bench him entirely. For 28 games, the Pistol sat on the bench, never being called on. Finally, on January 18th of 1980, less than two years after Pete was on track to make a run at the 1978 MVP, the Jazz let him go. It seemed to signal the end of an era; Pete had been a brief and spectacular blip, but the game had moved on and with time he would be forgotten.

Pistol Pete's Last Ride: Red Auerbach, Larry Bird and the Boston Celtics

If there was one man in the NBA who always believed in Pete through all of his highs and lows, it was nine time champion head coach and (at the time) four time champion executive Red Auerbach. In his 30 years of turning the Celtics into the game's greatest powerhouse, he had seen the game change a lot, and he knew that those who changed the game were rarely initially accepted by the basketball world.

Originally, Red had resisted taking in Holy Cross' Bob Cousy, who threw no-look passes and dribbled behind his back. He believed that it was impossible to win with such a player. Six championships, eight assist titles, and an MVP later, Red was more than happy to admit he was wrong. At one point, a young Bill Russell was ridiculed by journalists and basketball minds for jumping to block shots instead of playing with his feet on the ground, as they did in the professional ranks. Red took full advantage of his player's revolutionary defensive strategy, and brought home nine championships in ten seasons with teams spearheaded by the big man.

Pete's unique approach to the game went far beyond Cousy's no-look passing and Russell's defensive approach, but Red never questioned his abilities, often referring to him as the greatest playmaker in the game at the time. Here's a video of Red fighting his conventional instincts regarding Pete's deceptive passing abilities, and generally being in awe:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Ruz5VkBt0Q&t=110s

Despite managing a team that was fighting to be first in the East led by a certain rookie by the name of Larry Bird, Red wanted the hobbled Maravich badly. It was a marriage that should have come years earlier, but maybe, just maybe, Pete would have something left to offer.

For Pete, much of his career and particularly the past five years had been a joyless slog. The things that he had accomplished individually on the court had only given him momentary happiness; he was relentlessly chasing a dream of cheap jewelry that was somehow meant to put him back together. On the Celtics, Pete's moments of magic were few and far between. He no longer threw between the legs passes or finished impossible double clutch shots between defenders; those things were beyond him now. He was a shell of himself, but he knew that. He was willing to sacrifice to bring himself a title, and ultimately, peace.

On the Celtics, Pete was entirely an off-ball player, and primarily a spot mid-range jump shooter. Despite his reduced athleticism, receiving passes from an older Tiny Archibald and a young Larry Bird (who threw some of the same behind-the-head no look passes that Pete had brought to the league a decade earlier) allowed Pete to have some of the easiest baskets of his career.

In his 26 regular season games, he was effective in his limited role, averaging 11 points in just 17 minutes, shooting .494 from the field and .909 from the line. Famously, Pete shot 10–15 from three in his only season playing with a three point line. In winning 19 of those 26 games, the Celtics were able to clinch the first seed in the East over Julius Erving's 76ers, which had a tremendous defense anchored by Bobby Jones and Maurice Cheeks, and a serial backboard-breaker in Darryl Dawkins who brought the power.

After receiving a first round bye, the Celtics would face Moses Malone's Houston Rockets in the second round. Maravich was not meant to play significant minutes, but his hot shooting throughout the series earned himself further consideration. In a four game sweep, he hit 11 of 18 shots, and averaged six points in his nine minutes. For the heavily anticipated Eastern Conference Finals against the 76ers, Pete would be getting a bigger role.

On the court, Pete fought for his life, frantically running to keep in front of more athletic guards on defense or to get into position for an open shot. Despite his limitations, Pete played with as much defensive intensity as he ever had. His efforts were enough to make him passable if not solid, averaging six points off the bench in his 13 minutes, trying to will himself and his team to glory.

Aftermath:

In the end, Pistol Pete, who had dedicated everything he had and everything he was to basketball, wouldn't get his storybook ending. In losing games one and three by one possession, the Celtics would bow out of the playoffs. While Red intended to keep Pete in tow for another season, Pete couldn't take it anymore.

A month before the start of the 1980–1981 season, prior to which the Celtics would trade for Robert Parish and Kevin McHale to get over the hump and win a championship, Pete quit and withdrew completely. Over the next two years, there was very little seen or heard of Pete Maravich.

In that time, he had again begun to abuse alcohol, again to devour survivalist magazines and fringe ideologies, constantly searching for something to find peace in. Between his wife and two young boys, nobody could reach him.

Two months before his death, Pete revealed that his eventual suicide felt like an inevitability by 1981. At his lowest and most desperate point, Pete described being given a lifeline. He recalled that in the middle of the night, a voice, coming from God, loudly and clearly called to him to "lift thine own heart". He described falling to his knees and weeping, saying "I've got nowhere to go. If you don't save me, I won't last two more days."

In Christianity, Pete would find lasting peace for the first time in his life, as he came to believe that his obsessive pursuit of fame and success had led him to deeply rooted unhappiness. For the first time in his life, Pete had found what he described to be true joy, trying to spread a message of hope and how his life had changed. He would go on to say that he would rather be remembered for his faith than as a basketball player.

Tragically, following the pattern of Pete's life, a good thing couldn't last. From the moment that Pete was born, his heart was a ticking time bomb. At just 40, his heart had changed but it still gave out, leaving a wife, two young kids, and a brilliant legacy behind.

On the court, Pete knew exactly who he was. In Pistol's first years in the league, guards played within limited conventions; they didn't dribble with flair, use crazy tricks to deceive their opponents, and shooting from 25–30 feet out was seen as foolhardy. Pete refused to stick to the script, and as he had predicted, he would change the game forever. As time has gone by, the best guards have played more and more like Pete did in his dominant years in New Orleans. Even with his 68 points, scoring title, and run at the MVP, this is still his greatest NBA legacy.

He was the precursor to the awe-inspiring passing of Bird and Magic and the dribbling moves of Isiah Thomas. From there, players like Tim Hardaway, Allen Iverson, Jason Williams, Steve Nash, and Kyrie Irving would add their own flair, creating some of the most exciting and brilliant plays in recent history. Today, guards like Curry and Lillard regularly shoot from 30+ feet in transition, just as Pete had been ridiculed for doing fifty years earlier. Pete should be remembered for being one of the most innovative and spectacular players the league has ever seen, and for having a remarkable impact on the way the game is played today.

Pete Maravich lived a long life in forty years, reaching the top in a game that still took more than it would give. He endured hardship, tragedy, and numerous breaking points in his journey to find himself. By the end of his life, he had, and he dedicated what was left of it to trying to make the world a better place. That transformation, more than any resulting shift in the way the game has been played, is what Pete wanted to be remembered for.